AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1.   (Previously Presented) A method, comprising:

associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

deriving one or more community ratings uniquely corresponding to a particular

user by aggregating the one or more characteristic values associated with

the particular user and the one or more characteristic values associated

with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the online trading

community by the particular user.

2.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the online trading

community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a

network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying

or selling of goods or services.

3.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the

Internet.

4.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the

particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic

community.

5.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the other users of the

plurality of users comprise users that have previously traded with the particular

user.

6.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising maintaining a

relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the plurality of users are represented as the relationship tree including one or more n-ary trees.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data structure for each user of the plurality of users.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was sponsored by the particular user.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the deriving of the one or more community ratings for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more community ratings and the one or more characteristic values comprise numerical values.

Claims 12-13 (Cancelled)

14. (Previously Presented) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

derive one or more community ratings uniquely corresponding to a particular user

by aggregating the one or more characteristic values associated with the

particular user and the one or more characteristic values associated with

each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the online trading

community by the particular user.

15.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the

online trading community comprises an electronic community buying and selling

of merchandise over a network, the merchandise having at least one of goods and

services.

16.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the

one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback

concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in

the electronic community.

17.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the

sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

machine to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users,

the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user

and any user of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

Claims 18–20 (Cancelled)

21.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

community ratings for the particular user represent a reputation value

corresponding to the particular user.

22.   (Previously Presented) A method, comprising:

associating a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users

within an online trading community, the first characteristic value being

obtained for the first user utilizing a first feedback value based on

feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the

plurality of users;

associating a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of

users, wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading

community by the first user, the second characteristic value being obtained

for the second user utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback

received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of

users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first

characteristic value and the second characteristic value.

23.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising:

associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users,

wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the

second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by

utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the

third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a second community rating for the second user by aggregating the second

characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

24.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising maintaining a

relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of

users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendant of the second user.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (Previously Presented) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an online trading community, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users, wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading community by the first user, the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received

concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first

characteristic value and the second characteristic value.

29.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the

sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

machine to maintain a relationship tree between the first user and the second user

of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship

relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

30.   (Cancelled)

31.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the

relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and

other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

32.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the

first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first

user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value

corresponding to the second user.

33.   (Previously Presented) A system, comprising:

a first storage medium; and

a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user, and

derive one or more community ratings uniquely corresponding to a particular user

by aggregating the one or more characteristic values associated with the

particular user and the one or more characteristic values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user.

34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

a second storage medium; and

a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a network interface, the second computer to

receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the plurality of users,

generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the feedback, and

transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

35. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer including viewing computer.

36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

37. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to determine the one or more characteristic values based on the feedback value corresponding to the particular user.

38.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is

        accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the

        merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

39.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is

        to couple the first computer with the second computer over a network having the

        Internet.

40.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the

        sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

        machine to:

        associate a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users,

                wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the

                second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by

                utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the

                third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

        derive a second community rating for the second user by aggregating the second

                characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

41.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 40, wherein the

        sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

        machine to maintain a relationship tree between the second user and the third user

        of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship

        relationship having the third user as a lineal descendent of the second user.